

9 June 67

NOTE TO THE DIRECTOR

1. We have reviewed yesterday's paper in the light of your comments, the "Breezy Estimate" on yellow sheets that you sent us, Ambassador Bohlen's cable, remarks of Ambassador Thompson in a meeting at State, consultations with INR, and other consultations. The attached revised memorandum does not change our previous views in any important respect.

2. The resignation of Nasser (announced while we were doing this version) makes estimates difficult.

10 June 67
4:00 PM
Abbot Smith

Cover memo



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

9 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Current Soviet Attitudes and Intentions in the
Middle East

NOTE: It should be emphasized that this memorandum deals primarily with the immediate and short-term Soviet reactions to the current situation. Further, at the moment of writing, it is still quite unclear who is in control in Cairo, and the outcome of this situation will obviously affect Soviet policies.

1. We do not believe that the Soviets planned or initiated the Middle Eastern crisis. The Israeli-Arab war and, more specifically, the defeat of the UAR in that war, were developments which the USSR did not desire, initially did not foresee and, later, could not forestall. But it is clear that the Soviets were actively involved in the crisis from mid-May on.



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3. We believe that Nasser's decision to blockade the Gulf of Aqaba (announced on 23 May) was made without Soviet counsel and that the Soviets received little or no advance warning of it.

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Moscow had no foreknowledge of the move; the Soviets displayed some uncertainty as to how best to handle the issue; and they carefully avoided any subsequent sanctioning of Nasser's move to close the Gulf (though they did say that the entrance to the Gulf was in Egyptian territorial waters, as they had 10 years before). But

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our belief that the Soviets did not approve of the Gulf closure rests partly on our judgment that the Soviets were well aware that this one move could provoke an Arab-Israeli war.

4. Clearly they miscalculated the course of events. Nasser moved faster and further than they anticipated. The Israelis did go to war and inflicted on the Arabs a defeat far more rapid and complete than the USSR could have expected.

5. Soviet policy since the outbreak of the war has rested essentially, we think, on several considerations; the USSR's concern to avoid direct involvement in the war and to escape the risk of a direct confrontation with the US; its desire to preserve as many of the gains of the prewar crisis (both Soviet and Arab) as possible through diplomatic and propaganda means; its devout wish to avoid the stigma which would attach to Moscow if the Arabs suffered a complete defeat and the Soviets did little or nothing to prevent it; and, presumably, its hope that -- through it all -- they could preserve a viable relationship with their principal client in the Middle East, Nasser.

6. On the whole, the Soviets have behaved within the kind of guidelines suggested by the considerations listed above. They

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have maintained their propaganda attack against Israel; they have continued publicly to support the Arab cause; and after hostilities broke out they quickly made direct contact with the US to proclaim their interest in peace and, implicitly, to reassure President Johnson that they plan no confrontation with the US over this issue.

7. Federenko's agreement in the UN to a ceasefire without the conditions demanded by the Arabs presumably reflected Soviet fear that, unless the fighting was soon halted, the Arabs would suffer a disastrous defeat. But this same action cost the USSR something within the Arab world. The partial Soviet abandonment of the Arabs at the UN will have to many the appearance of at least a partial sell-out.

8. Moscow has probably decided that its task now is to pick up as many pieces in the Middle East as it can, and has probably already estimated that its chances to recoup from recent setbacks are fairly good, especially over the long term. The Soviets still have impressive advantages in the area, the principal ones being the high tide of anti-US and anti-Israeli feeling, and the Arab belief that the USSR is the only major power likely to provide support for them in the foreseeable

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future. The Soviets probably believe that the US has suffered more severe and lasting political losses in the Arab world than they have.

9. The Soviets are probably hurting enough to take a new look at their attitudes and policies toward the Middle East. But they are probably not hurting enough to abandon their normal caution in international affairs and to seek compensation for their losses by lashing out against the US elsewhere in the world. There are no places where dramatic Soviet gains could be scored without risking a confrontation with the US or, at the very least, substantial damage to existing Soviet policies.

10. We do not foresee a period of active Soviet cooperation with the US in the Middle East. Soviet willingness to act in at least partial concert with the US on the question of an immediate and unconditional ceasefire was born of the needs of the moment and did not, we think, reflect long-term considerations (other than the standard Soviet desire to avoid direct confrontation with the US). Basic US and Soviet goals in the Middle East -- including, for example, the USSR's wish to increase its presence in the area and the US desire to prevent this -- have not been altered by the current crisis.

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11. Indeed, it seems likely to us that, once the fighting has stopped, the US and the USSR will find themselves in dispute over a variety of issues associated with an armistice. An immediate question will be how far and under what terms the Israelis withdraw from the area they have occupied. Without attempting to examine here the complexities attending this problem we note only that the Soviets will be in a position to regain some favor with the Arabs by supporting the Arab position in the matter. They will continue to denounce the Israelis as aggressors (as they have already done), and will condemn almost any policy the US may adopt as one either of defending aggression or of hesitancy and insincerity in restoring the rights of its victims.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

ABBOT SMITH
Acting Chairman

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